

## FAREWELL ADDRESS BY BOBBY JOE SEALES

As I look over this great group today - I honestly don't know how to express the feelings I am experiencing at this very moment. Your graciousness has unexpectedly and completely overwhelmed me—there aren't many times when I'm speechless, but today I am almost speechless.

My adventurous, wonderfully fulfilling and rewarding journey as President of the Shelby County Historical Society and Director of the Shelby County Museum & Archives really began when my Third-Great Grandfather Enoch Seale and his wife Mary made their long and laborious journey by wagon-train from South Carolina to Alabama Territory that later became Shelby County. Life then was hard, severe and filled with many dangers - yet they prevailed in this new land. They like today's generation had disappointments and setbacks but still had hopes, dreams and confidence in their future. We need to thank our ancestors—for it is because of them and their desire to make a better life for their families, their ultimate sacrifices and accomplishments that has made us the people we are today.

After my early retirement in 1992 as an Auditor and Corporate Credit Manager I began researching my family lineage and began coming to the Archives. The credit for building the foundation and being the pillars from which the current Archives arose belongs to Earl and Madine Evans. The Archives was opened in 1980. There was never a more committed couple, striving to document and preserve the early history of Shelby County. Then, Miriam Fowler began acquiring items to start a Museum and in 1984 the first floor of the Museum was opened followed by the second floor in 1989. In a general referendum the citizens of Columbiana passed a resolution in 1978 by one vote not to tear this building down. Thanks to those Columbiana residents for their fight to "save the old courthouse."

The early members of the Shelby County Historical Society felt the same way my ancestors felt as they began to explore the possibilities and the unknown areas of forming a historical society. The Shelby County Historical Society was organized in 1974 with Ken Penhale as its first president. Ken, because of his love of history [especially the Helena area], was what held the Shelby County Historical Society together during its formative years.

Other members to whom credit must be given are (1) Dr. Tom Caldwell, (2) Barbara Baker Roberts, (3) Mary Roach, (4) Charles Butler and many others [such as Sonya Lefkovits, Nell Fulton, Dr. Jim Lee, Johnny Lowe, Mr. & Mrs. Karl Harrison, Probate Judge & Mrs. Conrad "Bully" Fowler, Probate Judge Tommy Snowden and Probate Judge Patricia Yeager Fuhrmeister – and the list can go on]. Without the foresight of these great people, the Shelby County Historical Society and the Shelby County Museum & Archives would not have been able to begin or continue on its path to the greatness it enjoys today.

I have been very fortunate and honored to have had the opportunity to follow in their footsteps, with their guidance and support, and continue to help fulfill their dreams for this “Old Courthouse”. I am grateful to my wife Diane and our children Mike and Josh in their support over these years.

As I stand here today for my last time as President of the Shelby County Historical Society and Director of the Shelby County Museum & Archives my heart and soul are heavy with sadness yet at the same time filled with expectations of the future.

I cannot begin to tell you how much I love this “Old Courthouse” and what it means to me ... from its humble beginnings in 1854 as the Shelby County courthouse in Columbiana to today as one of the most historic buildings in Shelby County. It is within these walls that the fate of some of our early ancestors was determined - sometimes good and sometimes unfortunate. But today between these walls is where these ancestors left us a legacy and is a place where their memories still live.

The early beginnings of the Shelby County Historical Society and the Shelby Museum and Archives are deeply rooted in this grand old building. During my 16 years I have had the opportunity to see much accomplished:

\*Shelby County Historical Society Membership has grown from less than 200 members to over 900 members. Today, as I step down as President, we have more than \$10,000.00 in our checking account. In 1999 we had approximately a \$200.00 balance.

\*The laying of approximately 750 engraved bricks which in themselves are “history in stone”. Funding from the sale of these bricks allowed us to be able to pursue grants, to install track lighting, to purchase audio and video equipment, life-like mannequins with period customs, beautiful mahogany display cabinets and pedestals ... the list goes on. In 1999 we didn’t have a savings account. We have more than \$20,000.00 remaining today in two savings accounts.

\*Additional grants were obtained to replace and repair the windows and install storm windows including the replastering the crumbling inside walls.

\*And you know, like many of us today our foundations aren’t what they were in our early years, well we had to pull in and tighten up the back wall, but this old building continues to live, amaze and delight everyone that stops by for a visit or tour.

It is an honor for us to be known as having one of the largest Historical Societies and a “state of the art” Museum & Archives in Alabama. For example: (1) In 2010, as a current ongoing project, we began to digitize our county records. Members, like Representatives Mike Hill and April Weaver and Senator Cam Ward, have been supportive and helped with funding for our state-of-the-art equipment in our research library—which is used and benefits many people. Because of this type of support we are in the process of initiating several new programs. (2) The James Ray Kuykendall Award was received for the second time in 2012 from the Alabama Historical

Association. The first one was received in 1994. We are the only Historical Society to have received this award twice. (3) In 2010 the Historical Society received state recognition from the Alabama Department of Archives & History Local Government Records Commission in appreciation of our longstanding and successful efforts to collect, preserve, and disseminate information on historical Shelby County records, newspapers and artifacts through our operation of the Shelby County Museum & Archives. These historical records are now available to everyone and are preserved for future generations. In October I was honored to receive the prestigious Marvin Yeomans Whiting Award for 2015 presented by the Society of Alabama Archivists for the preservation of historic documents and oral history. (4) We have won many recognitions over the years; such as, for three years in a row [2002-2004] the Shelby County Historical Society won in a national contest the best published Quarterly Magazine [Diane Seales was Editor at that time] and the Shelby County Museum & Archives won 3 years in a row [2013-2015] Best of the Best Museums in Shelby County.

As you can see we have been very busy over the last 16 years, making this Shelby County Museum & Archives a facility you and all of Shelby County can be proud ... and for you to be proud to be member of the Shelby County Historical Society that continues to move forward.

None of this would have been possible without the help and support of the people of Shelby County. I would be remised if I didn't take time to thank some very supportive people that made all this happen (1) Alex Dudchock, our County Manager for his direction, guidance and always his support. (2) Our Shelby County Commissioners, past and current, have been there with their moral and financial support. (3) Our Alabama Representatives, Senators and current Governor Robert J. Bentley. (4) Our Probate Judge and Circuit Clerk for their support in allowing us to maintain and digitalize these old county records. (5) Our Historical Society's Officers and Board of Directors over the years [past and current] ... who were always there with their support. (6) But most important I want to thank you, "the members of the Shelby County Historical Society"—for without you, your support and especially for your trust in me, none of what you see today would ever have been possible. You are like family to me and it is you that has made the society what it is today.

**As a small gift of appreciation Diane and I would like to present this portrait of Isaac Shelby as a token of our love for you, Shelby County and for the rich history it holds. This great county was named after him. Be sure to come by and read the plaque that tells you more about him.**

In closing let me begin with a couple of quotes from two people we are all familiar:

- (1) Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us."
- (2) And as Eleanor Roosevelt so elegantly said: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

I have fulfilled my dream -- just look around you today at this magnificent building and the history it holds—history that is preserved for you and our future generations. Now is the time for me to bring “my journey” to an end. Retirement to some may be an ending, a closing of the past—but for me it is the beginning of a new and partially unknown journey into my future.

So where do I find the words I need to say to you when it is time to say good bye?

After much soul searching and thought I simply want to say Thank You!! Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your help, involvement and support in making your Shelby County Historical Society and Shelby County Museum & Archives what it is today—but I most especially want to thank you for the friendships I have made over these past 16 years.

Always ... Love, respect and protect your heritage and history.

**“History Never Written Is Soon Forgotten”**

Thank you and May God Bless each and every one of you.

Bobby Joe Seales  
President of the Shelby County Historical Society, Inc.  
from 07 November 1999 to 01 November 2015

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